

Councillor Matt Hartley

Leader of the Opposition, Royal Borough of Greenwich
Councillor for Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham ward

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Kevin Foster MP
Minister of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR
By email

10th October 2022

Dear Kevin,

Southeastern December timetable changes – lack of consultation

I am writing to raise concerns about the introduction by Southeastern of a new timetable for its South East London network – and to request that the Department for Transport intervenes to ensure that Southeastern conducts a full public consultation before any change are made.

I enclose a copy of my letter to Steve White, Managing Director of Southeastern, which details my specific concerns about the changes to timetables on the Sidcup, Bexleyheath and Woolwich Lines that run through the Royal Borough of Greenwich – which include reductions in peak services across the network, and the loss of various direct services to Charing Cross and Cannon Street Stations.

As detailed in my letter, these changes which will cause significant detriment to the residents that I represent in Mottingham, Coldharbour and New Eltham, and to Greenwich residents more broadly. More than 10,000 residents signed a petition organised by local media outlet SE Nine against these changes in a matter of days, demonstrating the strength of local feeling on this deterioration of the timetable.

In questioning why this timetable has been introduced without any form of public consultation, Southeastern have informed me that:

“Throughout the pandemic we've had to move at pace to re-write our timetables and we are still coming out of a fluctuating situation with customer numbers. It takes many months to design and consult upon a timetable change - which we simply haven't had as we continue to respond to the variations and fluctuations in passenger numbers.

Therefore, the Department for Transport agreed to allow train operators to continue to implement, demand-led timetables without consulting formally during

this period.”

It appears that Southeastern are relying on the extraordinary measures adopted during the pandemic, to justify its decision not to consult on these December 2022 timetable changes.

I believe the lack of consultation on this issue is wholly unacceptable, and have called on Southeastern to delay their planned changes to their next scheduled update – May 2023 – so that a consultation can be carried out (and, just as importantly, listened to and acted on).

I would be grateful for your view on this as the Minister responsible for rail services, and would request that the Department for Transport intervenes to ensure that Southeastern carries out a public consultation before any timetable changes are made.

Finally, in my view, this latest episode only strengthens the case – which my colleagues and I in the Greenwich Conservative Group have supported for several years – for responsibility for commuter rail services in South East London to be transferred to Transport for London. I hope the government will carefully consider this option – which has broad support from across the political spectrum and from the London Assembly – as a mechanism to finally bring about the improvements that local commuters deserve.

Thank you for your time in considering this matter, and I would be grateful for your views on the points raised above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Hartley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Matt Hartley
Leader of the Opposition, Royal Borough of Greenwich
Conservative Councillor for Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham

Enclosed: Letter to Southeastern Managing Director Steve White, 10th October 2022